

Beyond a Single Category: Intersections of Oppressions in Northern Nigerian Women Poetry

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Abstract—This paper contends that the poetry by women in Northern Nigeria addresses several forms of injustices that mutually support one another. The poets confront multiple forms of categories used to maintain the discriminatory structure and institutions that give some people undue socio-political and economic advantages over others. The discourse affirms the inadequacy of gender or class lenses through which the profundity of the examined poems can be scrutinized. A proper study requires multidimensional and intersectional study of the poems through several ways in which they expose multiple layers of oppression that intersect and mutually inform and strengthen one another. This study portrays the commitment of these poets as marginalized writers from the North. Through an intersectional prism, these poems project how gender, class, ethnicity and regionality coalesce to build a structure of injustice in a mutually supportive way. A workable solution requires that these oppressive tendencies be challenged in their wholeness and not individually as they overlap and support one another; hence this study renders an intersectional reading informed by post-structuralist frame.

Index Terms—Intersectionality, poetry, women in Northern Nigeria, oppression.

I. INTRODUCTION

The poets studied in this paper come from Northern Nigeria, a less advantaged region of the country in terms of Western education. In terms of coverage of literary works, Northern Nigeria has not been adequately explored by critics of Nigerian literary works as attested by Abdu who points to the academic neglect of works from the region [1], and Omoha corroborates that "Northern Nigeria is certainly disadvantaged in growth of the literary typology compared to East, South, and West of the country when the relationship between written and oral literature comes to focus" [2]. In fact, most of the compendiums on Nigerian literature "reveal a loud absence of a significant Northern Nigerian presence" [3]. In addition, there is absence of documented information on writers from the region [4]. Many people have written, and many are writing but they are yet to receive the needed critical attention. Thus, in contrast to the Southern part of the country, the North has produced so many literary writers that have not made it to the vast and voluminous critical works of Nigerian literature [4]. In addition, there are more publishing houses in the South than there are in the North. In terms of gender, male writers in Northern Nigeria have higher chances of being published and studied than their female counterparts. Works

of female writers suffer critical neglect despite the existence of poetry in the region by a woman, Nana Asma'u Usman Danfodio, as far back as the early 1800s [5] which provides detailed literary responses to the happenings of the time [6].

Northern Nigeria is highly conservative and patriarchal in its power relations pattern irrespective of the ethnic or cultural setting in question. There are several cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities in the region with Hausa as a majority. The privileging of the male over the female cut across these identities in many forms. This practice has succeeded to register itself into the academic study of cultural artefacts. Therefore, most of the few critical works on writings in the North concentrated on male authors and paid little or no attention to the female ones.

To understand the entanglements of the structural injustices in the region, it is important to note that the poets studied in this paper; Maria Ajima, Nana Aishatu Ahmad, and Angela Miri, are also from ethnic minorities (Egede in Benue State, Fulani in Gombe State, and the Pan in Plateau State, respectively) that have suffered from neglect and domination. Thus, they experience, first-hand, many kinds of injustices which become the themes of their poetic productions. At the level of genre, power hierarchy exists, with poetry at the bottom and least popular in the region in both production and reception. Remi argues that poetry in English is an emergent tradition in Northern Nigeria [7], a largely unexplored genre in comparison to the prosaic writings in Hausa and English that have received critical attention even though, as earlier stated, poetry writing, especially in Hausa Ajami (Hausa poetry in Arabic script) has been in the region for centuries.

Consequently, these female poets do not see the category of gender as the only space in which they are marginalized and subdued. They understand that the injustice meted out to the woman in Northern Nigeria is reinforced by a larger structure created through the intersections of other forms of discrimination. Some of these are political oppression, economic subjugation, and a class injustice while others are regional through which negligence is imposed by a system that confers economic advantage to one region over others. Their poems reflect the intersections and interconnections of these several layers of discriminations, the poets' efforts to fight them and the kind of intersectional solidarity that they advocate. This paper counters the narrative of one of the previous studies that the writings by women in Northern Nigeria is, "about women and issues that concern women" [8]. The problem with this conclusion is that it excludes the efforts of women writers in addressing socio-political issues affecting the country. This gendered view of writing neglects several strands of women writings that transcend

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the gender debate and address other challenges in the society. Therefore, this paper registers the fact that feminism alone cannot be an umbrella term that can cover the diverse discourses that the poems address. Intersectionality is considered in this paper as the best term that brings together all the political, social, regional, ethnic, and economic discriminations that the poems address.

In the context of Northern Nigeria, the poems under study are not just artistic expressions. They are a vehicle for commitment. They are means through which political messages could be expressed. Poetry is a project for political engagement – an avenue through which the poets engage with political class and indict them of the retrogression and wanton corruption that have stagnated the country and made it to its present pitiable state. Poetry is also an educative tool. Through their poetic productions, the poets appeal to their readers in a tone that is educative to create political self-consciousness and social awareness in the reading public.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts post-structuralism as its theory of interpretation combined with ideas drawn from intersectionality. As a post-structuralist reading, the paper contends that poetry cannot be reduced to a single meaning, and hierarchies are subverted in the same way that oppressions are not ranked in intersectionality. In their political engagement, the poetry under study cannot be limited to a single commitment. Even though they are concerned about women condition, these poets still confront other modes of oppression in the society. Their poems possess the potential to serve as space for revisiting the gendered relationship that exists in the society and at the same time appropriating same attention to other forms of oppression. Derrida's notion of signifier (word, text, etc.) referring to many signifieds/meanings, senses applies here [9]. The poems do not have a single meaning. This is important because, writings by women from Northern Nigeria are previously reduced to a feminist project only, with a certainty of automation. The women were not thought of presenting their ideas out of the realm of feminism. Foucault's idea of the limit of concepts and terms in explaining knowledge production is very relevant to this study as it argues that one single theory cannot adequately cover the wide-ranging issues covered by the poems [10].

Post-structuralism questions nonsensical notions and assumptions previously taken for granted. It also destabilizes the idea of text having fixed meaning. The feminist label assigned to the poets under study is limiting. It restricts their work to a single area and efface their relevance in other contexts. Therefore, the choice of post-structuralism is informed by its influential conception of meaning, which is very crucial in literary analysis. It rejects the idea that meaning is controllable; that order could be established, and literary meanings are not proliferating. On the contrary, post-structuralism shows that in literary reading, meaning is informed by the term *difference*, a term introduced by Derrida which means meaning in every reading of the same text differs from the previous one and it defers in the next reading continuously, it could not be

pinned down [9]. It is always in motion. This constant motion makes meaning permeates everywhere in the text and complicates any endeavour to establishing fixity. Reading in post-structuralism is a speculative endeavour through textual engagements that foregrounds "*undecidables*," another term introduced by Derrida [9]. Dobbie succinctly captures the instability created by a post-structuralist reading that, "we may wish for stability, but we are caught in language, which refuses to stay fixed... meaning is always postponed, leaving in its place only the differences between signifiers" [11].

Post-structuralism and intersectionality are mutually used together in this paper. One of the reasons that enables this possibility is that both the two are very sceptical of ranking and hierarchy. Post-structuralism upsets the ranking order of speech over writing and deconstructs this way of ranked thought. It disrupts hierarchies and binaries. It is a kind of reading that identifies such hierarchies and reverses them to show that neither of the pair is superior to the other – they are interdependent. Mcquillan argues that Derrida's critique of Western thinking lies in the manner, "it most commonly operates by privileging certain terms to the exclusion of others, while presenting that exclusion as natural (for example, the privileging of Man over Woman, West over East). In this way, understanding is closed rather than opened up to the rich possibilities of meaning within a text" [12]. Similarly, intersectionality refuses the ranking of oppressions. It sees oppressions as inter-dependent and non-hierarchized. It disrupts these hierarchies and calls for an all-inclusive view of various strands of exploitation and oppression. It sees oppression as mutually supporting and inclusive, because a "key component of intersectionality is the claim that oppressions cannot be ranked... While oppressions are conceived as interlocking and mutually constituting, none are conceived as epiphenomenal of the others... no particular kind of oppression can be solved without solving all the others... oppressions are experienced as compounding and inseparable... that oppressions are ontologically constructed in relation to one another" [13].

III. DISCUSSION

Being from ethnic minorities, the poets studied in this paper address the injustice meted out to people due to their ethnic identities in Nigeria. This domination is a recurrent event in the Nigerian political landscape. It is one of the discriminations that results in the dissatisfaction among people and threatens the national fabric as minority ethnic identities become more and more suspicious of the majority. Ethnic category of oppression is a political and social reality in Nigeria. It determines where one lives, one's safety, one's access to social, economic, political, and educational opportunities. Some people enjoy some privileges at the expense of others for no reason other than being born into certain ethnic groups. To create a biological metaphor here is to say that the fixity of ethnic identity in the country's socio-political structures is like the DNA – genetically formed, unchanged, and permanent. This identity cannot be changed in the same way for a person's DNA could not be changed. This ethnic identity determines a person's accessibility to the socio-political opportunities and

privileges. This is so glaring that even political dispensation, the traditional pairing of candidates for the highest office in Nigeria must conform to this idea. President and Vice President come from different geographical regions and from different ethnic compositions, usually one of the major three – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. It was supposed to be a gesture to create peaceful transition and inclusion. But it has the tendency to keep minorities far away from power. The poets address some of these injustices with a view to sensitizing the public on a fairer, and more equitable society. What is interesting about their intersectional engagement is the simple fact that if the problems of minorities persist, the majority themselves cannot attain their own aspirations. In the end, injustice on one has the tendency to inflict other forms of injustices on others.

A. Nana Aishatu and the Fulani Predicament

Nana Aishatu Ahmad is one of the poets studied in this paper. She is from the Fulani ethnic background. In her collections, there are poems that address the long years of neglect on the Fulani people, most of them herdsmen who are disadvantaged – living in the forests without access to formal education, without political representation, without any certainty as regards to the future of their children. The state has no plan for their well-being. In their routines, they gave up all pleasures to provide meat and milk for other millions of Nigeria. Their efforts are largely taken for granted. As they sojourn to feed their cattle, they often clash with local farmers who have taken over grazing lands. In a poem titled, “Heard You,” [14] p. 40 the poet challenges the deception of Nigerian political elite who have consistently promise to improve the lives of Fulani people but do nothing towards fulfilling that promise.

The poem is a tercet, a three-line stanza, composed of five stanzas. The diction, Nana Aishatu’s very usual style, is simple but arranged and adorned in a tone that expresses anger on the neglect of, and warning and reminder on the forgotten Fulani people. She adopts the voice of the first person “I” in the opening stanza of the poem. This positions her as a Fulani woman, as a person affected by the injustice of the majority that she experienced. In this poem, the speaker presents an intersectional view on the minority question in Nigeria’s national dispensation. She suggests that any campaign or policy that excludes the minority has lost legitimacy. The opening stanza goes:

I heard you proclaim
Human rights
And justice for all [14] p. 40

This stanza casts doubt on the speeches of political leaders, both in the country and outside it, who are pressing for those transcendental qualities of human rights and justice. The speaker admits that leaders speak in support of ensuring human rights and justice. But the tone registers the speaker’s suspicion and disbelief on these promises. The stanza is written in enjambment which starts from the opening line and continues into the next stanza. It also shows that all humans are entitled to justice and fundamental human rights. This must be extended to every person, including minority groups in the country. The stanza doubts and questions the sense given to these words – easily

spoken or expressed but difficult to apply. Any application of justice which excludes one category of people or one single person is an injustice. It is either justice for all or no justice at all. The next stanza specifically tells the promise made on the Fulani people. The first and second stanza are joined by an enjambment, therefore there is no comma or full stop in between. The poem continues:

That nomads
Must have a taste
Of knowledge [14] p. 40.

This stanza specifies the kind of promise made to the Fulani people. Due to their sojourn along grazing areas in the country, the Nigerian government often promises nomadic education for them. There is a National Commission for Nomadic Education in Nigeria established in 1989 by the General Badamasi Babangida military government to address the educational needs of migrant communities, who were largely Fulani nomads. But the objectives are yet to be fully realized. This is largely due to the absence of sincerity of purpose and political will. As such, nomads are left to wallow in illiteracy in the country. They are yet to have the educational opportunities enjoyed by the city dwellers. They are promised compulsory education, which is registered in the modal verb, “must” to indicate the obligation to educate the nomads. Here, knowledge is shown as a prerequisite for a successful life. It is a life ingredient which everyone needs to “taste,” including the wandering nomads. It is an experience that improves the life of people who have had it. The verb “taste” also indicates that knowledge is a journey without a final destination since one does not become fully satisfied by “tasting.” The two stanzas portray the essence of knowledge over all other comforts. The poet speaker does not ask for monetary loan to the nomads or hospitals to be built on the grazing lands or power supply on the grazing lines. Rather, she asks for knowledge as the most important of all. The next stanza continues to demonstrate the living conditions of the nomadic Fulani. It goes:

Better life
For our sisters living
Closely to nature [14] p. 40

The knowledge promised to the nomad will translate to better life for them. The stanza campaigns for girl child education. The call for educational opportunities for the nomad should also include the female child among them. It should not be patriarchal to exclude the female child as it happens in other situations (preference of educating the male child over the female one). But the stanza also educates the reader on the life of the nomadic Fulani. The Fulani people move around as a family unit – intact. This is largely why their children do not get the educational opportunities since they live in the forest. Their cattle are their main source of economic sustenance. Their life is “closely to nature,” devoid of artificiality. They do not enjoy basic amenities given by the government to Nigerians. The next stanza tells how these promises are empty. It goes:

All these have been disfigured
Mere words devoid of meaning

Before the merciful [14] p. 40

The first three stanza note the amazing promises made by government officials for the nomads. At face value, these are amazing programmes that would ensure greater good for the nomads. However, the speaker condemns them as, “disfigured,” because they were not made to be implemented. They were part of the scheme of injustice meted out to the minorities such as the Fulani nomads. The suspicion is further strengthened using the words, “mere words/devoid of meaning.” They are such because, they have been said repeatedly. They do not make any sense to the people for whom the promise is made. They remain meaningless to their addressors and to the “Merciful.” The last line of the stanza introduces the Supreme Being, the merciful as one of Allah’s attributes in the Qur’an. It reminds one of the nature of Hausa written poetry with its preaching tone. Nana Aishatu Ahmad is greatly influenced by the Hausa poetic composition. The essence of preaching at this stage of the poem is to remind the leaders that they are going to account for their deeds. The final stanza completes this preaching effort:

Souls are great that are pure
Pain is ladder to eternal bliss
The mouth that fasts here
Will dine in the next. [14: p. 40]

The use of first full stop completes the meaning of the poem. The five stanzas of the poem are joined syntactically and semantically. The poem does not have a punctuation mark from beginning throughout till the end of it. This absence unites the poem by creating a shared meaning. Enjambment runs from one line to the next, from one stanza to the next up to the final word. The final stanza, perhaps due to its spiritual appeal, appears to contain some abstract sophistication. There is syntactic inversion in the first line, “souls are great/that are pure.” This endeavour creates an othering process. The oppressed minorities are great because they are pure – unlike their oppressors who lie, shun away from their responsibility, and fail in their promises. The use of synecdoche, “mouth” to refer to starving people adds to the overall poetic quality. The stanza also appeals to the stoic character of the oppressed minority. They endure pain and this endurance gives them everlasting bliss. They believe that even though they are struggling now, they shall prosper in the next world. The word “here” represents the spirituality of the poet. What is interesting about this poem is the fact that while other poems on resistance by the poet end with a call for revolt, “Heard You” ends with a spiritual consolation. This is because revolt of the minority has the tendency to be met with disproportionate violence by the state apparatus.

B. Gender and Religion in the Poetry of Angela Miri

Angela Miri, like other poets studied in this paper, is a self-proclaimed feminist. However, her commitment towards a more equitable society is not limited to feminist agenda. She sees how religious discrimination follows the same pattern and reinforced gender discrimination. This wider intersectional prism enables her to address gendered oppression together with other categories of oppression without hierarchy. As an intersectional writer, she portrays

how categories of oppression that are informed by gender and religion coalesce to support one another and inform other categories of injustice. Her poetic composition transcends the sphere of femininity into religious discourse, and political engagements, especially the relations between ethnic groups in the country. The poems tell more about socio-political and economic challenges of Nigeria. Her composition combines the aesthetic with the political, the religious and the ethnic discourses. Therefore, Angela Miri’s proper study should attain to see her works in their wholeness, taking into cognizance their diverse coverage.

In one of her poems, “Eroding confidence” [15: p. 25], she addresses gender and religious discrimination. The Northern Nigerian patriarchal society expects her to be a slave to the whims of man. But the religious intolerance also affects her. Thus, she is a victim of two categories of injustice. Within her ethnic composition, a woman is exploited and oppressed by men who organize and protect the patriarchal structure that ensures privilege on men at the expense of women. Outside this category, she experiences religious intolerance around her. Religious intolerance is still a major threat to the peace and stability of Nigeria. It costs lives and properties due to violent clashes between adherents of Islam and Christianity. Therefore, the poetry of these women is still important in Nigeria’s nation building project and in building mutual respect among people. “Eroding confidence” implores the reader to be sensitive to the religious sentiment of others. It does this by challenging the reader to ponder on how ridiculous it is to be religiously intolerant. The poem contains four stanzas, of unequal lines. Since it appeals to the reason of the reader, not emotion, the first three stanzas end with a rhetorical question to create a poetic effect. These questions are important in challenging the reader to think. The poem opens:

What purpose is served
showering the goddess of another
with untold insults? [15] p. 25

The effect this stanza makes is informed by its formal aspect – the rhetorical question that adorns it. Instead of condemning religious intolerance, common behaviour among many Nigerians, including the educated ones, the poet engages the reader to think. Readers are asked to ponder on the benefits, if there are any, for disparaging the deities of other people. This mode of address enables the poet to reach the inner sensibilities of the reader. The position taken by the poetic speaker is very important in the overall aim of the project. The speaker does not single out the adherents of one religion and accuse them of religious intolerance. Rather, she asks readers why these things happen. The logic behind this is that no group of people are spared in the campaign against religious intolerance. In this manner, people who perpetuate this crime are called to ponder on this problem without necessarily feeling embarrassed or intimidated by the poetic composition. Everyone is invited to ponder on these questions and since there is no benefit for religious intolerance, they are expected to rise above it. Another significant poetic effect that the stanza achieves is the refusal to hierarchize religious beliefs. The choice of the word, “goddess,” refers to the traditional religious practices that are not popular in

Nigeria nowadays. Most of religious tensions and conflicts, especially those that occur in Jos, the hometown of the poet, occur between Muslims and Christians. But the speaker uses the word, goddess, a female deity, to register the fact that not even traditional religion should suffer intolerance despite its unpopularity. The thesis of the poem is that all religious sensibilities should be respected. The next stanza continues in the same question form, asking readers the motive behind religious intolerance. It goes:

What benefit is derived
Condemning capable hands to the dregs? [15] p. 25

There is similarity in the opening lines of the two stanzas here. "What purpose is served/What benefit is derived." Both begin with a wh-question, "what" followed by the nouns "purpose/benefit" and closed with the verbs (served/derived) that are introduced by an auxiliary (is). This repetitive pattern adorns the two stanzas and adds to the poetic effect of the poem. This repetition is not limited to the level of syntax. It also involves repetition in terms of meaning. The two stanzas register the fact that religious intolerance has no justification. The poem contains very simple syntactic structure with everyday words as its diction. The speaker sees people competing to draw the beliefs of one another to the refuse. The speaker uses the word, "capable hands" to refer to the religious beliefs of people. They are capable hands because they produce the needed psychological and emotional stability in their adherents. These two stanzas show that everyone involved in this trade of insults is also a victim. People discriminate against one another. However, when one implores the reason that the poem appeals to, they will realize that they are victimizing one another. They are both victims and perpetrators. The fourth and final stanza of the poem swerves into the angle of gender relations. What it registered is the simple fact that oppression is damaging to both the victim and the victimized. The stanza goes:

Indubitably, respect begets respect
And chauvinism begets chauvinism
Whether male or female.
Womanhood complements manhood
Both create equilibrium for joy [15] p. 25

The stanza above reveals the essence of intersectional politics. At all levels, people should strive to do what they expect from others. If one religious adherents respect another, they are automatically respecting themselves, and same applied to the gender relationship. Men are not authorized to prejudice over women. The poem invites readers to rethink over male-female relationship. Chauvinism is largely practiced by men over women. Likewise, the same way the poem refuses to single out one religion for intolerance, it refuses to present men as the perpetrators of chauvinism. The poem does not close the possibility of women to be chauvinists. What the poem projects is the fact that chauvinism is wrong both on the perpetrators and their victims. Therefore, what is needed is an understanding between men and women. These categories are not oppositional, according to the poet, rather they are complementary. Angela Miri stresses a rather non radical form of feminism.

Generally, "Eroding confidence" [15] p. 25 engages the reader to respect the beliefs and sensibilities of others, to accommodate difference, and tolerate the other. By doing so, the reader is automatically respecting themselves in the process. Essentially, the poem calls for acceptance of the other since the other is a complement to the self not oppositional. This project will inevitably restore confidence in people because division and intolerance lead to erosion of confidence in humanity by human beings. This recognition and celebration of difference are what delineate the poem as intersectional solidarity. This engagement for fairness is the essence of intersectional project. The poem is an affirmation of difference because, "solidarity does not require the erasing of our differences, or the rooting of our political projects in the moments that our interests are aligned. Solidarity is thus the name for affirming the differences ... it is also the name for recognizing that every time I fight against anyone's oppression or exploitation, I fight against my own, I fight for everyone's" [13].

C. The Politics of "Our People": Structural Discrimination in the Poetry of Maria Ajima

There is no contention that Maria Ajima is a committed feminist. She identifies with a strand of feminism that is reconcilable with some of her cultural and religious beliefs. She hails from Egede ethnic minority in Benue State, Nigeria. Despite that fact that she writes a lot on the female condition in the society, like Ahmad and Miri, she also sees the interconnection of other categories of oppression such as gender, class, ethnic, and regional in the society. In the poems analysed here, she exposes how the Nigerian political elites maintain economic and political hegemonies over others by a structural discrimination that positions and maintains the poor and the rich as an ordained status quo. The poems overtly expose the hypocritical affinity to ethnic identity shown by the political elite whenever they want to exploit ordinary people and use them as canon fodders to ensure their influence on the national politics. What the poems intend to communicate is the simple fact that majority of Nigerians live in the same misery irrespective of their ethnic background while the elites continue to share the country's resources among themselves using the same narrative of "[O]ur [P]eople." During political campaigns, that phrase is repeatedly hummed into the ears of Nigerians. People are made to feel that the elites care for them. But the elites use the phrase to get support from ordinary people who would be abandoned immediately after election. After every election, the structure maintains power, resources, and influence on the elites; and hunger, poverty, and squalor on the poor across ethnic divides is maintained. The poet calls for intersectional solidarity that unites people irrespective of ethnic backgrounds against their oppressors.

In a poem, "My People" [16] p. 16, the poet calls on people to ponder on the seed of hatred planted in them by the selfish elite. People have been divided along ethnic lines; they have been conditioned to think of one another as enemies while they are the same. Despite the hatred, they are all victims of their oppressors. The title of the poem reminds one of the same mode of address used by politicians. The choice is made to ridicule them and expose their hypocrisy. The tone of the poem is sad. It laments the

disunity among people that should have united for a common cause. It signals the deceit of the elites who incite ordinary people against one another for political gains.

The poem is structured without stanza. It maintains a single theme throughout and aims to enlighten the public and unite them for a common cause. The opening part of the poem reminds the reader of the sameness in the people who see themselves as different. Their sameness is blurred by the elites so that they would not unite. The poem voices concern over the way in which people have allowed themselves to be exploited through the perpetuation of lies, division and hatred by the oppressors. The poem opens:

My people
So unique, so beautiful
A oneness
Like cells in a nucleus
Such sameness, yet such dislike,
My people
A few lead you astray for self
Creating dissensions
A noose around your neck
Yet blindly you follow [16] p. 16

As stated earlier, Maria Ajima is from Egede, a minority ethnic group from Benue State. During her civil service career and her writing, she experienced discrimination first-hand for being a minority. However, in this composition, she does not limit her calls to Egede people. She writes for every oppressed Nigeria. She opens the poem with a possession – she considers the exploited people as belonging to her without consideration to their ethnic background. The first thing the poem registers is the obvious similarity among people. They share same social reality – poverty, ignorance etc. They are victim of the same social structure that empowers the rich and the powerful. She emphasizes the uniformity with the repetition of an adverb, “so” that comes to strengthen the senses of the adjectives describing the people. This likeness calls for unity not disunity. This sense of wholeness is strengthened in the words “nucleus, sameness, unique.” Moreover, there is a sense of whole in them as suffering people which should have invoked harmony among them. Alas, they are not enlightened enough to be united against their oppressors. Their wholeness is weakened by the hatred that is sown among them. The title is repeated to emphasize the call being made and this repetition enables the speaker to educate the reader on the reason behind this hatred.

The speaker further informs the reader the beneficiaries of this dissension. They are the elites, introduced as “a few” – the political elite who are found among every ethnic group in the country. Their narrative is such that creates discord among the people. This discord among the suffering people makes it easy to maintain their grip on the country’s resources. The poet sees people’s ignorance as a rope against their necks. They are trapped to death by inability to decode their real enemy. They could not fathom the reality of their existence. The poem is a warning to Nigerians against this dangerous division. The last two lines of the poem provides more information on the identity of the victimizers – “There is a chaff among you/ Who commit disservice to you” [16] p. 16. Repeatedly, the elites are

blamed for this division. The speaker asks people to look around for their real enemies.

In another poem, “Joblessness and Despair” [16: p. 53], addresses the trauma that young people experience irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. It condemns the structural injustice meted out to young people and how this unjust arrangement threatens the fragile peace in the country. Like the previous poem, “Joblessness and Despair” is also written in the same style, it does not follow stanza pattern and it is joined by enjambment. It goes thus:

I watched the face of a jobless youth
It was somewhere
Between hopelessness and despair
Time to time
It changed expression
Lighting to hope
Crashing to despair at dashed hopes. [16] p. 53

The imagery created in the poem above gives a perfect description of what confronts the Nigerian youths. Youth unemployment has been on the rise in Nigeria for decades. This affects both men and women and at the same time it cuts across ethnicities and regions. The structure that keeps the best jobs for the children of the elites and pushes the poor youth on the margin does not discriminate based on religion, ethnicity, or any other category. In this poem, the speaker positions herself as an active observer. In a lamentable tone, the poem expresses disappointment and dismay over the youths’ condition in the country. The youths are traumatized by the bleak future confronting them. Some of them are university graduates who roam all places in search of a job, but they could not find it. Every advertisement is “lighting their hope” which does not last long because on arrival, the position is given to the children of the elite without interviews before the advertisement. This poem is a reminder on the structural injustice enshrined in the Nigerian bureaucracy. Injustice begets injustice and the perpetuation of this act threatens the peace and stability of the country.

IV. CONCLUSION

The poems studied serve as examples in the way various forms of discriminations coalesce and inform one another. Intersectional writings such as the poems studied here appeal for a more just and fairer society as the only way for peace and tranquillity for all. An injustice on one person, if tolerated, leads to another form of injustice on another person and the extension continues till everyone in the society becomes a victim. As intersectional solidarity effort, these poems call for elimination of all forms of discrimination as a way forward for the society. Such a view is important in a country as Nigeria. A solution to one category of discrimination is not a way forward. People are discriminated for belonging to a gender, belonging to a region in the country, belonging to a social class, belonging to an ethnic background, adhering to one religion, etc. A lasting solution to this is a wholly approach to all these kinds of discrimination without recourse to their hierarchy. These poets are undoubtedly feminists, but they saw the need to include other forms of discrimination happening

around them. A solution to gendered discrimination is not enough for a woman. She would still be discriminated against by regional, ethnic, class, religious and other forms of categories of oppression.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conducted the research, analysed the data and wrote the paper.

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